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SUBJECT: GEORGIA REACTS POSITIVELY TO NATO SUMMIT OUTCOME

¶1. Although Georgia did not receive a Membership Action (MAP) at the NATO summit in Bucharest, top Georgian officials have lauded the results as a major success, pointing to language in the April 3 summit communique that Georgia and Ukraine "will become members of NATO." In a broadcast from Bucharest, a visibly pleased President Saakashvili termed the document a "crossing of the Rubicon by Georgia," in which NATO members in support of Georgia had prevailed in a "life and death struggle" against the skeptics. Saakashvili said that while MAP is "a pledge that if you pass through the action plan well, you may become a member of NATO," the communique is a "direct commitment by NATO that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of the alliance." Saakashvili expressed certainty that Georgia would be a member of NATO "much sooner" than the end of his presidential term in five years.

¶2. Foreign Minister David Bakradze also commented that Georgia received something more than MAP: a pledge that Georgia will join the alliance. Bakradze said the language in the communique marked an "absolutely new stage in relations between us and NATO" and is "determinant for Georgia's future."

¶3. Initial reaction from opposition figures and the Georgian media to the Bucharest summit focused on the decision not to give Georgia MAP, which was reported earlier than the release of the communique. Several opposition party leaders blamed the Georgian government for losing MAP due to a failure to fulfill commitments to democracy. Respondents to an unscientific survey conducted during the popular night talk show of Rustavi-2 TV on April 3 focused on other explanations: about 65 percent identified the Russia factor as the reason for NATO's refusal to grant MAP to Georgia, 33 percent pointed to the separatist conflicts, and only 2 percent identified lack of democracy as the primary obstacle. During the day April 4, Georgian media began highlighting statements from U.S. officials on the positive language in the communique, and it is likely that the reaction in Georgia to the summit will shift as the importance of the communique sinks in.

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